

Content with Content

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BIG IDEA - Being content with our content.

scripture focus - **Philippians 4:10-13 NLT** "How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. **I have learned the secret** of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength."

Is your glass half empty or half full? The secret to being content is being happy with your content. Did you hear that homograph? One word, two meanings.

The Apostle Paul, led by the Spirit of God, writes to the churches in Philippi about this idea of contentment. **He says he learned it!**

He learned in whatever situation he was in to be positive and self-sufficient. This is from a guy who faced death threats, was beaten several times, and almost died, not once but three times in shipwrecks!

I have one question... Paul, how did you pull this off?

Is the glass half empty or half full? That is the wrong way to look at just about anything in life. The real question is; **Can we be content with whatever amount is in the glass?**

Whether it's full, half or nothing at all!

To find out how Paul learned to cont, let's take a quick look at how he got to Philippi in the first place. Luke tells us in the book of Acts.

Acts of the Apostles 16:6-10 NLT "Next Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia at that time. Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they headed north for the province of Bithynia, but again the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go there. So instead, they went on through Mysia to the seaport of Troas. **That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, "Come**

over to Macedonia and help us!" So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, having concluded that God was calling us to preach the Good News there."

Paul looks for a synagogue but finds none, so he just seems to wander down to the banks of a river, But was he wandering or was God leading him?

Acts of the Apostles 16:13-15 NLT

"On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. One of them was **Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. She and her household were baptized,** and she asked us to be her guests. "If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my home." And she urged us until we agreed."

Read Acts 16 on your own and watch how God works and moves people to exactly the place they should be.

Philippians, together with Philemon, Colossians and Ephesians, have been called his 'prison letters', because Paul wrote each of them while in prison.

It's important to note this because of what the letter contained. The letter, **Philippians, is filled with powerful themes of joy, unity, and deep spiritual ambition to complete God's purpose for his life.**

It is in this context we find our discussion and theme for this month – contentment.

Philippians 4:10 ESV

"I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity."

Philippians 4:11 ESV "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content."

Paul uses these phrases and words that help us understand how he "learned" contentment.

First, he writes about his frame of mind and let's us see where he has come from.

Vs 11. Not that I am speaking of being in **need (husterésis: need, want)**

From the word, *hysteréō* (from 5306 /*hýsteros*, "last") – properly, at "the end," i.e. coming behind (to "be posterior, late"); (figuratively) **coming behind and therefore left out; left wanting (falling short).**

Paul never viewed himself as lagging behind others in life. He never thought he got the short end of the stick, the raw deal, dealt a bad hand. Paul didn't see himself as "victim of circumstances"!

Second, Paul writes of this very plain, ordinary method of discovery: I simply learned it.

for I have **learned (manthanó: to learn)** properly, *learning* key facts; gaining "fact-knowledge as someone **learns from experience, often with the implication of reflection – 'come to realize.**

Paul didn't read a book about contentment or listen to a podcast or crowd-sourced for answers – he learned by experience. **Most of which was very difficult experiences.** Normally I see struggle and difficulty as negative and try to avoid it. Paul embraced these moments and learned from them.

Paul had plenty of experiences that taught him how to have an attitude, a position, a perspective of this word **CONTENTMENT.**

Third, here's what he discovered from learning in all these circumstances he found himself in...

whatever **situation** I am to be **content** (Paul says in my existence - *eimi*: I exist, I am) to be

autarkes (αὐτάρκης), as found in the papyri writings, means "**sufficient in oneself**" (*autos*, "self," *arkeo*, "see" A), "**self-sufficient, adequate, needing no assistance**"; hence, "content," - **self adequacy**

This is not in some idealistic, individual sense of being alone, hermit-like, not needing anyone in that community sense.

Paul's adequacy wasn't in his isolation, but it was in his ability to be "present in the moment" especially in this comparison to others, not having what they have.

Paul would not have looked at my full glass of water and his half full glass of water and said, "gee, Glenn has more than me. I wish I had a full glass like his."

How in the world did Paul do this? **How did he learn contentment?** How did he get himself to a place where he wasn't comparing to others and feeling shorted or even seeing his abundance and feeling bad about having more?

Yes, by experience. But how many of you figured out that **most people are DEVASTATED by bad experiences** and end up bitter and angry.

The bridge – from experience to feelings and behaviors.

Fourth, Paul gives us some examples.

He tells us in verse 12.

"I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of **facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.**"

Know how to be brought low – He made these critical connections, these bridges from **seeing his circumstances** to **understanding their value.**

- Know **éidō** (*oída*) – properly, to **see with physical eyes** (cf. Ro 1:11), as it **naturally bridges to the metaphorical sense: perceiving** ("mentally seeing"). This is akin to the expressions: "I see what You mean"; "I see what you are saying."
- Low (**tapeinoó: to make low, fig. to humble**) from the word *tapeinós* ("lowly, humble") means being God-reliant rather than self-reliant.

Paul doesn't apply these lessons, these principles ONLY when things are really bad. He also applies them when things are really good!

Also know how to abound -

- **Abound (perisseuó: to be over and above, to abound)** *perí*, "all-around" which indicates **abundance or surplus**) – properly, exceed, go **beyond the expected measure**, i.e. above and beyond ("more than . . ."); "what goes further (more), surpasses"

Fifth, Paul drops the what he calls the "secret" to making this work.

He's learned through experience.

He now makes this **walk across the bridge from SEEING to UNDERSTANDING.** From viewing **what's happening to him** and realizing that **he can choose how he feels about it.**

We cannot control what happens to us. We can control **what we do once it happens**. We get to, no.

We must see what has happened and then make a decision about:

how we feel,

how we process,

how we react and most importantly –
what we do with that experience!

Paul writes the critical key, the mystery!

I have learned the secret! (**mueó: to initiate into the mysteries, hence to instruct**)

myéō (akin to 3466 /*mystérion*, "mystery") – properly, shutting the eyes and mouth to experience *mystery*; (figuratively) *initiated into* the wonderful "mystery revelation" of learning to be *content in Christ* in every scene of life – *no* exceptions! See also 3804 /*páthēma* ("suffering"). [The metaphor was also used of "the initiatory rites of the pagan mysteries. 'I have been initiated' " (WS, 893).]
Reflection:

Experiencing the revelation of the Holy Spirit enables the believer to learn God's "open secrets." By experiencing faith ("God's inworked persuasions"), every decision (action) of life becomes equally, eternally meaningful. The word comes from muó (to shut the eyes or mouth).

Sometimes to fully learn, to really experience God, you have to embrace the mystery of God, through the Holy Spirit. We have to shut our eyes, shut our mouth, close out all the voices telling us what to think, what to do, turn off the crowd-sourced opinions and reach out in faith to grab what God wants for us!

This could be translated **"I learned the mystery of God's eternal perspective!"**

Then Paul switches from the mystical back to the plain understanding of every person who loves food.

Do you love food? I do.

He says, **I've been full and I've been hungry!**

- Full (**chortazó: to feed, fatten, fill, satisfy**) From *chortos* (a field full of grass); to fodder, i.e. (generally) to gorge (supply food in abundance) -- feed, fill, satisfy.
- Empty (**peinaó: to hunger, be hungry**) From the same as *penes* daily working, toiling for food. (through the idea of pinching toil; "pine"); to famish (absolutely or comparatively); figuratively, to crave -- be an hungered.

To have abundance to having nothing, back and forth, who knows how many times.

With or without I am okay with it.

But that's NOT the secret! Being humbled to being bountiful. **From being full of great food to being hungry and going without. This is not the secret.** Living these polar opposite experiences was not the mystery he learned.

What was it? What did those experiences reveal to him?

In whatever state I find myself in, **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!"**

In Greek it reads, I have strength (ischuó: to be strong, have power) in the one who strengthens (endunamoó: to empower, dynamóō, – properly, to impart ability) me.

For Paul he learned to be content with his content through the understanding that He is strong through Christ because Jesus imparts ability in him when he is LOW on resources or abundant in supplies. Strong when he has a full tummy and satisfied or empty and hungry.

So back to the glass and how much is in it - Paul would say he still draws strength from Christ whether it's **Full, half or nothing at all!**

My hope is that we never mis-apply this verse again!

The main point is **NOT** accomplishing some impossible feat or facing some great fear – the point is **strength to be content within**, through the power of Christ, His ability through us, from whatever we may face.

I don't know what experiences you've had, nor your origin story. I don't know if you've have come from having nothing or losing everything.

Or your experience has come from wealth and abundance, never thinking about yourself as poor or in need.

Either way, Paul's secret is not a secret anymore. Christ has come in your loss, in your humility, in your struggle of having nothing and wants to impart his power, his ability to thrive in you!

Christ has also come in your abundance, searching, needing just one more thing, one more sale, one more win and also wants to impart his power to satisfy, to be your contentment!

If you need that supernatural, mysterious move of the Spirit of God to sweep into your soul and fill your heart-gaps and hurts, to wipe out your comparisons to others and what their glass may hold, to be filled with the power of Christ to strengthen you.

I want you to make your way down and let God do a work in your life.

Be content with your contentment! Let him take your empty life and fill it. Let him take your half empty life and fill it. Let him take your full life and top it off to overflowing!

NOTES

Scriptures

Acts of the Apostles 16:9 NLT “That night Paul had a vision: A man from Macedonia in northern Greece was standing there, pleading with him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!”

Acts of the Apostles 16:13-14 NLT

“On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. She and her household were baptized

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Philippians 4:10-13 NLT “How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn’t have the chance to help me. Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. **I have learned the secret** of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.”

Questions

Q: When looking at your glass of life, how do you see it - Empty, Half or Full?

- Q: Have you had a time in your life when you had nothing? Share about it.
- Q: Have you had a time when you were living in abundance?
- Q: Do you struggle with comparing to others? In what way?
- Q: When contentment means "self sufficient," how does that compare to our need for others?
- Q: Paul learned the secret of living in every situation. What was that secret?

COMMENTARY REFERENCES

The New Bible Commentary

According to the record of Acts 16:9–10, Paul went there (together with Silas and Timothy) in response to a vision in the night in which he saw 'a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ' As the story of Acts 16 unfolds we read that in Philippi **Paul found no synagogue, but on the Sabbath he discovered a 'place of prayer' by the riverside**, where a group of women gathered. One of these women, Lydia, 'a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira', appears to have been the first convert, and she opened her home to Paul.

In what is said about Christian living **there are certain dominant notes in the letter:**

1. **Joy.** The noun 'joy' or the verb 'rejoice' are used sixteen times in the letter. Paul speaks of joy in prayer (1:4), joy in the fruit of his work (4:1) and joy in suffering, even facing death (2:17). He rejoices where there is unity and fellowship (2:2), finds joy in the gifts of his friends (4:10) and has joy when he knows that others are preaching Christ (1:18). He encourages his readers to rejoice in their faith and in their relationship with the Lord (1:25; 3:1; 4:4), and in their receiving and welcoming a brother in Christ (2:28–29).
2. **Fellowship and unity.** Paul writes with gratitude for the Philippians' partnership in the gospel from the beginning (1:5), as they shared in God's grace enabling the defence and the confirmation of the gospel (1:7). It was a fellowship 'of giving and receiving' that he had known with the Philippian Christians (4:15). He encourages them to continue 'standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel' (1:27, nrsv). It would make the apostle's joy complete if they were 'like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose' (2:2). He wanted to be sure that the church at Philippi was not allowing its fellowship to be marred by selfishness, pride or party spirit (2:1–4). Where there was disagreement between members, help needed to be given so that the unity and fellowship and witness of the body was not spoilt (4:2–3).

3. **Paul's spiritual ambition.** No letter shows this more vividly. We see the completeness of Paul's commitment to Jesus Christ, and his single-minded desire to know him and make him known. This is shown most clearly in 3:7–14, but alongside that passage we should set Paul's hope and longing expressed in 1:20 that he would never be ashamed, but with courage make sure that Christ would be 'exalted in [his] body, whether by life or by death'. In 4:11, 13 he can speak of his contentment in any circumstances, any deprivations, any difficulties, as long as Christ strengthened him to bear them and Christ was being glorified through them.

The Bible Exposition Commentary

Philippians 4:10–23 (BEC): **THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT**

The trouble with him is that he's a thermometer and not a thermostat!" This statement by one of his deacons aroused the pastor's curiosity. They were discussing possible board members, and Jim's name had come up. "Pastor, it's like this," the deacon explained. "A thermometer doesn't change anything around it—it just registers the temperature. It's always going up and down. But a thermostat regulates the surroundings and changes them when they need to be changed. Jim is a thermometer—he lacks the power to change things. Instead, they change him!"

Contentment is not complacency, nor is it a false peace based on ignorance. The complacent believer is unconcerned about others, while the contented Christian wants to share his blessings. Contentment is not escape from the battle, but rather an abiding peace and confidence in the midst of the battle. "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11).

Two words in that verse are vitally important—"learned" and "content."

The Overruling Providence of God (Phil. 4:10)

The Unfailing Power of God (Phil. 4:11–13)

The Unchanging Promise of God (Phil. 4:14–20)

The New Bible Commentary

Philippians 4:11–13 (NBC): 11–13 Their gifts had been a joy and encouragement to him, but he was not relying on them, nor, by writing like this, was he soliciting further gifts. He could honestly say that he had learnt the secret of contentment with outward circumstances, whether he had little or much. He knew that his Lord would not fail to give him what was necessary and to strengthen him to face every situation. In writing these things Paul uses two words that had significant religious and philosophical use in those days. The word translated content (Gk. *autarkeῖς*) means 'self-sufficient'. It was regarded by the Stoics as high virtue to be detached from outward circumstances and to have resources in oneself to meet every situation. Paul uses the word in the sense of his being independent of circumstances, but his all-sufficient resources were, he said,

through him who gives me strength, the living Lord Jesus. The other word, translated I have learned the secret, was used in the mystery cults for initiation into a secret. Paul's secret of living was an open secret, available for all who would walk the way of Christ. It was the secret of contentment, since to know Christ and to be called to serve him was 'unsearchable riches' (Eph. 3:8). How far we know the secret of contentment and to what degree we are proving the sufficiency of Christ for all the demands of our lives are always challenging questions for us as Christians

<https://biblehub.com/greek/714.htm>

Corinthians, Timothy, Hebrews, John 1

Vines Complete Expository Dictionary

CONTENT (to be), CONTENTMENT

A. **Verb.**

1. **arkeō** (ἀρκέω, 174) primarily signifies "to be sufficient, to be possessed of sufficient strength, to be strong, to be enough for a thing"; hence, "to defend, ward off"; in the middle voice, "to be satisfied, contented with," Luke 3:14, with wages; 1 Tim. 6:8, with food and raiment; Heb. 13:5, with "such things as ye have"; negatively of Diotrophes, in 3 John 10, "not content therewith." See enough, suffice, sufficient.
2. **suneudokeo** (συνευδοκέω, 4909), in 1 Cor. 7:12-13, *rv*, signifies "to be content"

B. **Adjectives.**

1. **autarkes** (αὐτάρκης, 842), as found in the papyri writings, means "sufficient in oneself" (*autos*, "self," *arkeo*, "see" A), "self-sufficient, adequate, needing no assistance"; hence, "content," *Phil. 4:11*.
2. **hikanos** (ἰκανός, 2425), "sufficient," used with *poieo*, "to do," in Mark 15:15, is translated "to content (the multitude)," i.e., to do sufficient to satisfy them. See able.

C. Noun.

1. **autarkeia** (αὐτάρκεια, 841), "contentment, satisfaction with what one has," is found in 1 Tim. 6:6. For its other meaning "sufficiency," in 2 Cor. 9:8, see sufficiency.

Summary Review

1. Paul writes about his frame of mind – self adequacy

2. Paul explains this very plain, ordinary method of discovery: He simply learned it.
3. Want Paul discovered from learning - the bridge
4. Paul gives us some examples – loss and abundance
5. Paul drops what he calls the “secret” – Christ’s power